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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3839
INFO RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL PRIORITY 7918
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6891
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2464
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 5732
RUEHPK/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 8397
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 4338
RUEHPW/AMCONSUL PESHAWAR PRIORITY 2961
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 005267

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2017

TAGS: PREL PGOV PK

SUBJECT: GOP URGES U.S. TO BACK OFF PUBLIC CRITICISM

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) On December 5, MFA convoked Polcouns and the Ministry of Information convoked Press Attach to complain about public statements by in-country Mission officials. MFA's Acting Director of Americas Sohail Mahmood told Polcouns that our consuls general were making "inappropriate" "political" statements to the press following meetings with opposition politicians. The MFA had no problem with our meeting with opposition figures, but urged that we stop making press comments that were seen as unnecessarily provocative. (Note, Foreign Minister Khan made a similar appeal to Ambassador in November.)

¶2. (C) On the same day, Ministry of Information External Publicity Wing DG Mansour Suhail convoked Press Attach to express concern over recent statements by Embassy officials on media restrictions. He specifically mentioned statements the Press Attach made about the urgency of restoring full media freedom after her visit to Power99 FM radio, which had been off the air and all its equipment confiscated since the declaration of the state of emergency on November 3. Suhail, without providing specific charges, said repeatedly that the radio/TV stations that had been taken off the air had "violated the laws of Pakistan." He added that it was not appropriate for foreign diplomats to comment on these subjects.

¶3. (C) Both Mahmood and Suhail defended the GOP's recent actions under the state of emergency as necessary and noted President Musharraf's efforts to develop free media in Pakistan. Mahmood repeated Musharraf's public urging that the West recognize that Pakistan needs time to develop fully as a democracy.

¶4. (C) The GOP then released a press statement admonishing both the U.S. and EU delegations for talking to the press after meeting with opposition candidates.

¶5. (C) Comment: Mission is continuing to express publicly USG policy to promote free and fair elections and urge the GOP to lift the state of emergency, free all political detainees, and restore media freedoms. We view these "warnings" as part of the ongoing political campaign, in which there has been heightened sensitivity to perceived western and Saudi influence in the political process. We suspect the warnings also reflect President Musharraf's annoyance that we continue to press on restoring media

freedom.

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